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Southwest Strategy Reporter

June 1998

On December 16, 1997, nine federal agencies in Arizona and New Mexico committed to working with the public and each other in a collaborative effort which is now known as the "Southwest Strategy."

What is the Southwest Strategy?

The Southwest Strategy is a commitment by federal agencies involved in natural resources management to work in collaboration with each other, the public, and tribal, state, and local governments. The federal agencies participating in the Southwest Strategy recognize and respect the jurisdictional authority of the Governors and sovereign tribal nations of Arizona and New Mexico. The goal of the strategy is to maintain and restore the cultural, economic, and environmental quality of life in Arizona and New Mexico. The strategy will address community development and natural resources conservation and management within the jurisdictions of the involved federal agencies. It will proceed in a manner that is scientifically based, legally defensible, and implementable.

Which federal agencies are involved?

Many agencies within the Departments of Agriculture, Defense and the Interior are currently participating in the Southwest Strategy. Agencies included to date are the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Defense. Other departments or agencies may join later.

Why do this?

Management of federal lands has become increasingly complex in recent years. Arizona and New Mexico have large expanses of public and tribal lands intermingled with private lands, fast growing metropolitan centers, scarce water resources, unique cultural resources, diverse and fragile ecosystems with numerous endangered species, and many competing demands on public lands and water resources. Agencies, tribes, and the public need to work better together in a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, effort.

How will this be done?

A collaborative problem solving approach will be used to address natural resources issues. Collaboration is
a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions. Through this approach concerns are heard and addressed, information is shared, and technical knowledge sought out.

Collaboration is not an end in and of itself, but is a means to achieve more consistent and responsive service to the public. It is also an agreement to continue talking despite differences and changing circumstances.

Will this strategy affect ongoing agency business?

No and yes. Agency work will continue as collaborative processes are being developed. The legal and regulatory responsibilities for each agency will remain the framework for agency work, as always.

However, this is a new way of doing business. We want to learn from and build upon existing successes as we deal with increasingly complex issues in Arizona and New Mexico.

What is happening?

During the first stage of the strategy, federal agencies have greatly improved interagency communication and collaboration. A number of internal interagency teams are addressing issues of immediate concern to federal agencies in the Southwest, such as community development, Endangered Species Act Section 7 streamlining, legal issues, and communications.

In the second stage, the public and the federal agencies will jointly design processes for future collaboration. State, tribal and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and interested individuals will be encouraged to participate. A few contacts have already been made as interested groups have sought information about the Southwest Strategy, such as Arizona's and New Mexico's Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Arizona Resource Advisory Council.

In the third stage, the participants will use the new processes to develop a comprehensive strategy to manage natural resources in a manner that maintains and restores the cultural, economic and environmental quality of life in the Southwest.

How are the federal agencies organized today to proceed with the Southwest Strategy?

Work Groups are being established to address specific immediate federal issues in the Southwest. These groups may be short term or standing groups and may include representatives from the field, regional, and national staffs. The roles of the work groups vary. Some were designed to help get the strategy started. Others were charged with developing ways to solve immediate to short-term issues which were primarily federal issues. Some of the groups only have a short-term life span while others may have broader participation by the public. The Regional Implementation Team provides guidance direction,
and monitoring of these groups.

What work groups have been organized to date?

The *Communications/Collaboration Design Work Group* is comprised of two teams. The Communications Team (COM) develops and releases information about the Southwest Strategy to both federal employees and the public. The Collaboration Design Team (CDT) will assist agencies, tribes and the public in developing processes for collaboration.

The *Information Resource Management Work Group* will identify ways for participants to share information and provide information in useable formats.

The *Research and Data Collection Work Group* will identify and respond to scientific data gaps and research needs.

The *Section 7 Streamlining Work Group* is developing ways to make the Section 7 consultation process under the Endangered Species Act more efficient.

The *Legal Work Group* provides technical and legal support, and coordination of litigation issues.

The *Water Resources Work Group* will collaborate with federal, tribal, state and local authorities to design an interagency process to address Clean Water Act compliance and the Clean Water Action Plan.

The *Community Development Work Group* identifies ways to address the economic and social effects on communities resulting from grazing management changes and other natural resource decisions.

The *Endangered Species Act Work Group* will coordinate the implementation of requirements found in Biological Opinions, as well as recovery activities among federal agencies.

How is this funded?

Funding to develop this strategy is coming from within existing agency budgets.

How long will it take to develop the Southwest Strategy?

Developing collaboration processes with the public is starting. This will proceed at different paces in different areas and will take at least several months to evolve. Some contacts have already been made. The agencies are encouraged by the number of individuals and groups who have asked to participate.

How do I obtain further information?

Two small Southwest Strategy offices are being established in Albuquerque and Phoenix. The Albuquerque Southwest Strategy Office is up and running and the Phoenix office will be sometime later this summer.

Questions regarding this interagency strategy may be addressed to the Public Affairs office of a participating Federal agency or by contacting the Albuquerque Southwest Strategy Office at 505/346-2517, 346-2518, or fax 346-2522.

How would you like to participate in the Southwest Strategy?

Mail to:

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